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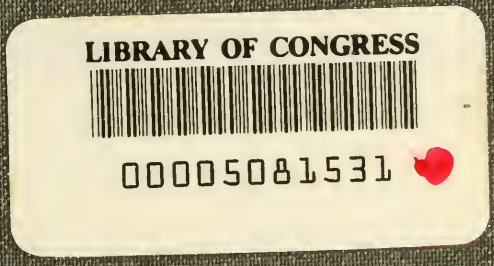

WHAT IS THE MATTER?

A

POLITICAL ADDRESS

AS

DELIVERED IN MASONIC HALL,

OCTOBER 28th, 1838.

BY FRANCES WRIGHT D'ARUSMONT.

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WHAT IS THE MATTER?

[As delivered in Masonic Hall, New York, on Sunday evening, October 28th, 1838, and being intended as an olive branch of peace to all honest American citizens, under whatever standard of party ranged, at an important crisis in the history of their common country.]

What is the matter?—I feel entitled, Fellow-citizens! to ask this question for my own satisfaction, and called upon to ask it for yours; deafened as we have both been by noise and clamor which were none of our seeking; and for myself, threatened in life and limb, and all but squeezed to death, while peaceably, tho' arduously, following out the mission of a Public Teacher. A mission long familiarly understood by the American people; and now, as I am fully satisfied, generally consecrated in their respect, confidence and affection. What is the matter? A woman, and she by no means a new character—steps forth to address her fellow-beings and fellow-citizens—not for the first, but for the thousandth time, in a city whose very walls are familiar with her name; and in a country, whose very air is impregnated with the principles of which she has ever been, and is the faithful and consistent expounder. Can this be the matter? Can this be the exciting cause of all the clamor and the outcry which fomented by faction, caught up by rumor, and blazed forth by an incendiary press—has astonished and disturbed the city? No.

"What then *is* the matter?" Before I attempt to answer this question *radically*, on the large scale—

with reference to great general political causes and events—let me speak to the smaller and more immediate circumstances which have surrounded us in this building; and let me state how I, most unconsciously, unsuspectingly and altogether undesignedly, came to station myself in the hornet's nest of the great Whig Head Quarters, mistaking it for an altogether neutral and peaceable, if not friendly, region. I am called to explain these circumstances on the present occasion, because this is the last time that I shall address the Public in this Hall; and because my occupancy of it has been made the *pretext* for deafening the city and myself with the hubbub which has been gathering weekly, louder and louder for a month past.

My engagement with the lessee of this building is now closed. I have adhered pertinaciously to the precise limit of that engagement, in occupying a building rented to me without one objection being made at the time of my own personal application for its use. This application was made on my part in perfect singleness of heart; without one motive calculated to give rational cause of offense to any one. These motives I shall, with my usual frankness, explain; in the view of removing all those trifling, but perhaps irritating misconceptions which, as I have been informed at least by a gentleman intimately associated in his private relations with influential members of the Whig Party—if they did not exactly inspire, were employed by a few misguided individuals as a means to excite and foment, that opposition, carried out to brutal violence, with which myself and the Public have been assailed within these walls.

Let me observe then, that I applied for the use of this Hall without any reference to its being the Whig

Head Quarters; and simply in the natural course of things; as a short statement of facts in connexion with my different occupancies of this building will render evident.

It was in this Hall that I first addressed the Public of this city, in the winter of 1828, and raised the standard of American sovereign Democracy against the foreign Federal standard of church and state. I occupied it for a course of evenings, during a universal excitement far greater than any we have witnessed during the past weeks. All inquiry was then a novelty, and the people awoke at the appeal so suddenly made to their reason and patriotism, as from a profound sleep. The first and instantaneous consequence of that awakening was the famous meeting held in this city against the Sabbath mail petitions, which were then outraging the ear of Congress; a meeting that was echoed back by the Report of the Committee of the United States Senate. The mass of all parties and all sects then rallied thro'out the nation. The millions were, as always, on the side of Truth and Liberty; the thousands on that of bigotry and slavery.

But the thousands, here as elsewhere, and then as now, owned all the buildings suitable for public purposes; and I was prevented from the further renting of this Hall thro' the direct and openly exerted influence of the whole combined clergy, together with the directors and leading members of the Bible, Tract, and home and foreign missionary societies.

At that time—when every large building was held under the control of the Federal, Church and State Party—Mr. Simpson, the public spirited lessee of the

Park Theatre, without any direct or indirect application of mine, addressed to me a note, tendering me the use of that House. The circumstances under which he made, and I accepted, that offer were far otherwise appalling than any which the ruffian gang of the Courier and Enquirer can now create in this city. Thro'out the day of the evening on which I met the public in the Park Theatre, the walls of the city were covered with placards, foretelling and provoking riot, fire and bloodshed. The Federal Church and State press gave forth the same cry, and not one single paper then existed in this leading city and state of the Union, with the courage to answer it, nor even with the independence to allow me to address one word to the public thro' its columns. A thrill of awe and panic seemed to run thro' the veins of the population. While the violence, the persecution, the endless intrigues, the hunting from house to house, the personal intimidations, the threats to my life—made by ruffians forcibly entering my private study, were far beyond all that could now be dared, even in those head quarters of British Power—the Federal Bank ruled city of Philadelphia. Still I relied then, as I rely now; and as I shall ever rely, on the instinctive right feeling of the American people. I knew they would prove true to the most sacred of their own liberties—that of free speech, and free audience. They gave reason to my confidence; and when I entered alone upon the stage of the Park Theatre, my eyes fell upon a compact audience—firm, silent and collected. To that audience, under the circumstances described, I spoke, and from that time forward occupied the public Theatres here as elsewhere, whenever I wished to address the people effectively, until the

same Federal influences, under the standard of Bank and State, seized openly or secretly upon them also.

Two seasons ago at the same period of the elections, when the whole nation was agitated by the nomination of a Chief Magistrate; and at an epoch when that nomination was felt to involve every great question of state policy, that has ever held divided the mind of the nation, the use of this Hall was offered to, and procured for me by a gentleman—formerly an alderman of this city, and now a resident in the western part of this state—who had been mainly influential in the first building of it. He procured it for me also in the week preceding that of the elections, and even effected the postponement of some meeting, or other business of the Whig Party, in order that I might occupy it before I left the city for Boston. Certainly what I then said was to the same purport with all that I say now. It might too have been supposed much more annoying to the ostensible Whig Party; since my views were known to be on all great principles, and leading measures, (and I never trouble myself with any others,) conformable to those of the Jackson Administration, and consequently calculated—so far as they could be supposed to exert any such influence at all, to favor the nomination of the existing Chief Magistrate. Last year again—having twice incidentally, and I may say, as it were accidentally (for, it has so happened, that I have never at any time hired for my own use, and in my own name, those Head Quarters of the Democratic Party)—having twice spoken in Tammany, on nights when it was in the hands of a private society, I rented this Hall, without any, the smallest opposition for six successive Sunday evenings; and delivered six dis-

courses upon subjects quite, if not more obnoxious to party feeling than those which I have delivered at the present time.

It will be evident to all from this plain statement, that my application for, and occupancy of these Head Quarters of the Whig Party has been, on my part, a most innocent cause of offense. I came here because it has been in fact the only Hall which I have ever hired in the city; and because, also, it was the only building, of at all suitable size, then known to me, that I felt myself at liberty to hire. In Tammany, to the best of my recollection, I never spoke but four or five times in my life. Twice—now ten years ago—for the benefit of an aged man cruelly persecuted for opinion sake—Abner Kneeland; and twice or thrice last year when as I have stated, it was held by a private association.

The renting of that Hall was, it is true, offered to me by that same association on my arrival this season in the city, but was declined by me for this simple reason. To wit: that I have ever held it for a rule, not only to keep aloof from all sects and parties, but also, as far as in me lies, to avoid lending to rumor or to political intrigue, even the shadow of a pretext for associating my name with any of them. I was unwilling to address the public at large on Sunday nights in Tammany, while that Hall is known to be in the hands of a sect with whom the standing subject of disputation is the christian Theology; and because while standing aloof myself from all sects—anti-christian as christian, christian as Jew, and Jew as Mahomedan—I propose, as I have ever proposed, for my single object the gathering of all sects into the great family of one common

humanity, and all parties into the fold of a common country. Here then is the single motive which decided me, this year as it did the last, not to hire the use of Tammany from its present occupants on the Sunday nights; and here also are the simple causes which, when I saw an objection to the hiring of Tammany, led me—both in the natural order of things no less than as a matter of necessity—to hire the Masonic. Had I known at the time of any other procureable building, at once as large and as conveniently placed, and also better aired, better seated, and better constructed, I should most certainly have preferred it. All who may ever have had occasion to exert their voice within these walls, for any length of time, will know that it is not done without difficulty, nor without pain, and will feel with me, that some other and more suitable place of meeting for the purposes of public instruction is much wanting.

And now here, in all simplicity, is the plain history of my occupancy of this Hall. And surely it will be distinguished that if any high influences in the Whig Party, apprehend such especial injury to the Whig cause from my expounding American principles, and the high requisitions of patriotism within the walls of a building occasionally employed as the Whig Head Quarters, those same influences should see that they have been guilty of a long course of remissness in not securing to themselves its sole use and occupancy. They having failed to do this, and this Hall having been rented by me in the simple and straitforward manner I have related, surely it will be farther distinguished, that if any individual ever had cause to be astonished at interruption and outrage, in this place, no

less than in this city, and at this period of time, it is myself.

I own too that I have been, and yet am, utterly at a loss to comprehend the peculiar umbrage taken by—I know not how *large*—but, it would certainly seem, some very *potent* portion of the more *available forces* of the Whig Party, at the particular fact of my addressing the Public in this particular Hall. I have, indeed, been seriously assured, and by some who ought to speak with knowledge, that the cause of this extraordinary umbrage lay in some jokes passed by the New Era; and purporting that my labors in this place were conducted both for the especial advantage and under the especial protection of the Whig Party—anxious, at this time when a cloud was passing over its fortunes to endoctrine itself from my lips with the principles of ascendant Democracy. It may be that some of these jokes were provoking; but what then? It is neither my fault nor my merit should one of our Democratic Journals be given to be witty, and somewhat saucy and stinging in its wit. And surely it should be for me rather, if for any, to complain of the free use made of my name in conjunction, not with one, but, time about with every sect and party in the nation, as at the extreme terror with which almost every sect and party disclaim my fellowship and hurl me back at the head of their opponents. I could assure my Whig foes—since foes they insist upon being—that they are not one-half—nay! not one-tenth part as afraid of hearing my name pronounced in the same breath with their own, as are many of the, so-called, Democratic Republicans of Tammany. If any of the more sensitive of the Whig Party desire revenge upon their political adversaries, they have but to pay back

upon them the joke in kind. Let them call by the name of *Fanny Wright-men* those truth-speaking men of Tammany who, the other day, threw out the name of an honest man and stern patriot under the pretext of abolitionism, when they were only thinking of his too uncompromising democracy. Let my worst foes thus return the joke in kind. They will discomfit their adversaries far more than if they should finally succeed in breaking my head : an operation indeed which would probably not discomfit them at all, and which it will be seen, could only rid them of jokes quite as annoying and infinitely more embarrassing than any which may have been thrown upon the opposition. The truth of this is all but self-evident. No one is very likely to mistake me for a whig, nor a whig for a Fanny Wright man. But these same Jefferson-quoting men of Tammany—the one-half of them, it may be, with equal rights in their mouths, and nothing but well-paid office in their thoughts—ah ! when the whigs throw me at *their* heads, the hit is palpable, and the smart—just such as malice could desire.

And now is it not for me to ask—What is all this pother about ? I get up to say a word to the people, and *the whole people*, without cutting them up into christians or anti-christians, Whig men or Tammany men, and both set upon me—I speak the honest truth—each after their own fashion. "Hush ! hush !" whisper the Tammany men, "You are going to spoil our elections." "Hold your tongue !" cry the Whigs, and try to knock me down. Truly, this is a very singular world, and this is a very marvellous country !

Here is a great city, the first in this Union, not merely as to the matter of size, but on the score of intelli-

gence, energy, enterprise, public spirit, ardent patriotism, and fearless and daring inquiry. And this great city—all at once, and as without a sign given—has been turned upon its head. The noisy Whig press has proclaimed riot and commotion as the order of the day. The main street of this vast city has been blocked up by wondering thousands. The people have assembled to guard the peace; the civil force to guard the people; the idle to stare; the noisy to clatter; strangers to wonder; and every man of common sense to ask if the population had gone distracted.

But—what *is* the matter? Are the British Tory Whigs upon us from Canada? No. The noise has been so loud that their commander-in-chief, little Victoria's Lord High Commissioner, has taken fright, and embarks with his whole retinue for Europe. What, then, can be the matter? My good friends, I will tell you. This is the matter. The Federal Tory Whigs are scattered at home; and our American Whigs—just opening their eyes to the light—are discovering that their old Federal allies, for some past years, have been making fools of them.

This is what is the matter. But, to cover up the case a little longer, to shuffle the real condition of things out of sight, and to set the public, more especially the *American* whig part of it, on a wrong scent—at least till after the elections—the *Federal Tory* Whigs shout "Fanny Wright!" and set Webb's gang upon her in the midst of the people—just, for all the world, as if *they* had started the hare—here—in this hall; when, every body knows, the true hare was started by the people two months ago on the west flank of the Mississippi, and there sent off at a bound to far distant Maine;

and, from thence that it has been flying west, east, north and south ever since, until now it is ready to spring into safe cover within the warm bosom of the Empire State.

This is what is the matter, my friends; and I am only helping, as my custom is, to turn the matter to some good and lasting account, by showing, alike to the victors and the vanquished, how we may all profit by past errors, and turn the hard lessons of experience to future good. Most true it is, that because I have undertaken this work of the good Samaritan—because I have applied myself to binding up the wounds of all the well-intentioned of the beaten party, and to showing that the interest of every honest American citizen is at this hour but one and the same—most true it is that our old incurable Federal Tory Whigs have, in their desperation, when driven again and again from the election field, made of my person a last battle ground; and that, what with Federal Tory Whigs pulling at it, and the people protecting it, it is honestly a marvel to myself that any thing is left.

But now I cannot very well make out in what this tormenting of me is to help the already shipwrecked fortunes of the Federal Tory Whigs. (I shall presently draw clearly the distinction between them and the American Whigs, whom I hold very generally to be a good sort of people; to be no more bent upon strangling me than they are upon destroying their country; and perhaps, moreover, to be, at bottom, quite as honest democrats and republicans as many who wear the title, and fight, under its cover, for place and profit, while they—the American Whigs—now standing in the minority, are cast into the shade.)

But, as I observed, I cannot see what the Federal Tory Whigs—whose peculiar character, interests, and objects I shall presently define—I cannot see what they, at this time, are to gain by the hue and cry they have raised in this city. Say that they should succeed in tearing me to peices, or stoning me to death, as they have at different times attempted—what then? Admitting that my life and labor should advantage somewhat the cause of the people and the interests of Humanity at large, still were both now stopped on the instant and forever, that would not prevent the passing of the Independent Treasury bill; and *the passing of that one bill knocks Federal Tory Whiggery on the head, and gives it its quietus forever.* This is true—true as any problem in the mathematics. But, true as it is, our American Whigs do not perhaps see how to write beneath it Q. E. D.

What is the first great national effect of the Independent Treasury bill? I beg you to observe, my friends, that I do not call this vital measure by the name of the Sub-Treasury bill; still less by that of the Sub-Treasury scheme. There is no scheme in the case. A scheme signifies something contrived; something artificial; something got up with ingenuity for purposes difficult to compass. Nothing of all this is in the measure proposed. The scheme was in *the absence* of an Independent Treasury. The scheme was in the substitute contrived for it. The scheme was in a national debt, and in the banking and funding bubble, associated with and based upon the national revenues. The scheme was in the conjurer's trick of a United States Bank, with a secret door leading into the Bank of England. The scheme was in the high tariff, commercial

credit, and paper money machinery. Ay! all this was the scheme, my friends; and, in very truth, it was a scheme with a vengeance!

Do you not see how the scheme worked, fellow-citizens? Why, it worked so as to make the people pay high taxes, and to pay them in the worst form of all—that of indirect taxes. It worked so as to throw into the American Branch Bank of England, (called the Bank of the United States,) a surplus revenue for the use of the mother bank in London. It worked so as to make the gold and silver of that surplus revenue serve the double, but most unequal, purpose of supplying what is called *the specie basis of a paper currency* for the United States, and of enabling the Bank of England to supply a *specie currency* to Great Britain. It worked so as to swindle our South of its cotton, our North of its labor, this whole nation of its lands and its treasure. It worked so as to render the State Banks the slaves of the United States Bank, the whole people the slaves of all the banks, the whole banking system the tool of Great Britain, the great American Republic the prey of the Holy Alliance. Ay! all this was the scheme; and such was the working of the scheme, to the prostration of people, country, national honor, wealth, greatness, human liberty, and for the consolidation of the whole land, capital, and labor of this last refuge of freedom, in the hands of the crowned despotisms of Europe.

But the Independent Treasury bill, fellow-citizens! is the reverse of all this. It is not a scheme. It is more even than a measure. It is a principle. It is the national independence realized. It is the effective, definitive annulment of this country's vassalage. It is the

first practical, efficient, decisive realization of the Declaration of '76. It is the day-star of constitutional liberty rising upon the earth, with the first cleansing of a national government from the pollutions of financial scheming. It is the first emancipation of a government at once from the odious enthralment, and from the corrupting influences and overwhelming tyranny of the money power. The money power!—that worst—that most deceptive, most corrosive power ever exercised upon earth, and which has been ever until this hour allied--openly or secretly—with administrational authority and executive command.

No, fellow-citizens! I do not call the great decree of the independence of the treasury of the United States by the name of a scheme; nor do I either call it by the paltry name of the Sub-Treasury Bill.

Observe! The name of "Sub-Treasury Bill" is a name descriptive only *of the mode* in which it is judged that a sacred principle may be the most effectually secured, and that a vital measure may be brought to bear. The name of "Independent Treasury Bill" is directly descriptive of the principle itself, and thus consecrates the proposed statute by its very title.

And, say! is there—can there be an American citizen not interested in the independence of his country's treasury, when that in fact is the independence of his country itself? Is there—can there be—an American citizen who conceives of any advantage to himself as likely to accrue from the young proud eagle of this republic remaining any longer clutched within the claws of the treacherous leopard of England? Ay! the leopard. That ancient, true, and faithfully descriptive emblem of English monarchy! Let the British gov-

ernment keep to that old emblem. It has nothing of the lion in its nature.

But now I have a word to say to that very large and far more honest division of the whig party, which I am wont to distinguish by the name of American whigs, in contradistinction to old British Federal Tory Whigs.

The American division of what has gone by the name of the whig party are not federalists, are not traitors, are not, and have not been the knowing and willing tools of a foreign Power, and that foreign Power the most cruel national enemy which this country ever has or ever will know—if indeed it ever has known or ever will know any other.

The thorough-going old British Tory, Federal Whigs are incurable. They, and their fathers before them, were conceived in treason, bred up in treason, live by treason, hope in treason, and will die in treason—unless indeed they should now do what their fathers ought to have done sixty-two years ago—unless they now make up their portmanteaux, dispose to the best they can of their property, and clear out of the United States in the next British steam packet. This is now definitively the only course for the old thorough-bred British Tory Federal Whigs to pursue, either for their own salvation, or for the peace and honor of the Republic.

But, as for all our American whigs, they are quite in a different category. They are not traitors to their country. They are not enemies to its peace and greatness. They have not staked their gain upon its loss; nor—for they are, after all, quite a shrewd set of men—are they by any means disposed to jeopard their own fortunes and political existence in furtherance of the

schemes of a faction with which, in reality, they have at the bottom, nothing in common. Our American whigs have been mistaken; that is the amount of their offence. And pray which of us is not exposed to error? And pray where are those intuitively infallible sages who have not, at some time, or in some way or another, taken a false view of things, or been deceived by some Belial, speaking with the voice of an angel of light? Oh Federalism! thou, to this hour, hast been that Belial to thousands upon thousands of America's children. Oh accursed offspring of an accursed parent! The spots on thy skin are those of the English Leopard. Thine is that Leopard's nature. Thine is his deceptive whining. Thine is his fœtid breath of pollution. Thine are his crouching, watching, stealthy, murder-designing wiles and lures. Thine is his tiger spring. Thine are his fangs all whetted for destruction. Oh Federalism! true child of British monarchy! Sixty-two years have the bright waters of democracy, and the onward-bearing flood of Revolution swept past thee and washed over thee. Still art thou what thou wert;—a viper in the cradle of the infant Hercules.

But lo! at last the reptile is detected. The child, with the strength of manhood and the wisdom of age, hath lured it forth from its hiding place, and throttled it in the eye of day. The Independent Treasury Bill hath done this my friends. The Independent Treasury Bill hath slain the viper. And—look!—hark! Hath it not startled—hath it not frighted the Leopard? Hear we not his smothered growl of disappointed rage? Turns he not from Canada? Trembles he not before that deep hush which foretells the tempest?

What! and when the enemy sees to read the sign—

the sign of his doom and of the whole earth's salvation—when he by his terrors renders homage to the wise hunter who slays him—shall any of those who are saved from his fangs fail to recognize their escape, and shout hosannas for the rescue? No, not one. Fellow citizens! not one. Every child of freedom shall arouse this day. Every prodigal son—every backslider from republican truth shall return to the home he had forsaken. The fatted calf shall be killed and all shall partake of it. Every son of America, who stands by the stripes and the stars instead of by the blood-stained cross of England—every sovereign citizen of this now secure Republic shall swell the note of triumph. Yes! all—all who call this land of promise their country—nay all, throughout the world, who have ever looked to it with hope, who love and who yearn for the happiness of man, and who have faith in his destinies, shall raise one united voice of exulting thanksgiving for the issue of those elections which have already spoken, and which have yet still more forcibly to speak, the independence of the Treasury of the United States.

Let all then in this hour depose the animosities, the jealousies, the suspicions of party. Let all at this hour —upon this question—be a united nation. Let traitor Federalism read in silence its final doom. Let the hopes of British Toryism expire in the Canadas. Let the names of Whig, Conservative, Tammany, Equal rights men, divide us no longer upon a measure on which the voice of a sovereign and national majority is already known. Now is the time for all to rally round the altar of country, and to present a united front to an awe-struck world. Now is the time for the

whole political sovereignty of the Republic to bury the hatchet; to take hands at home as a nation of brothers; to read to home traitors their lesson; to make fair treaties, and to set accompts strait, with foreign foes.

What is the matter? was the question asked. Fellow citizens! I have answered it. It is the Independent Treasury Bill that is the matter. It is the safe snatching of America's young eagle from the greedy clutch of the English leopard. It is this that is the matter. It is the fast sealing of that golden charter of the rights of man and the independence of the new world to which Federalism had given the lie, and which British fraud had thought to compass and to break. It is this—this only which is the matter. It is the bowels of Federalism that are racked with anguish, and her own mother on the banks of the Thames whose empire feels the throes of dissolution.

Rejoice then—rejoice in thy deliverance, young eagle! Rejoice in the advent of thy strength and approaching fulness of dominion! And now spread thy wings, imperial bird of the new world! Full fledged art thou at this day. Thy pinion is strong and thou canst cope alone with thy foes. The lightenings of Liberty are in thine eyes. The thunderbolts of her wrath are in thy talons. Thou art ready, and willing, and able to achieve thy last victory. The last chord is broken which bound thy youth in vassalage. Thou art *thy own*. Henceforth and for ever thou art thy own. Soar then aloft on the strong pinion which Freedom gave thee. Scatter to the four winds the foul and foreign harpies who battened on the blood and the sweat of thy children. Establish thine empire in peace and in power throughout the vast world which nature

hath disposed for thee. Try thy strength, bird of majesty! One bold defiance—perchance one fierce encounter, and the Leopard of England shall spring back to his jungle, all the tiger monarchs of the earth shall crouch in their littleness before thee, and all her peoples shall rise up and bless thee in the name of Freedom.

I have now filled the term of my engagement with the lessee of this hall; and I now feel at liberty, fellow citizens, to appoint you a rendezvous in a more peaceable, safe and civilized place than we have found to be the New-York Whig Head Quarters. On Sunday evening next I will meet you in Concert Hall, a commodious place of meeting, in a neutral and friendly house. There I hope to give no especial offense either to Whigs or Tammanies, and there, on the evening preceding the casting of your votes as citizens for the independence of the Treasury of your country, I propose to take for my subject THE DUTIES OF THE PEOPLE BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTIONS.

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